

# Leaders of California food bank spent millions on cars, Vegas trips, home renovations, suit says



The Foodbank of Southern California shuttered most operations in September after the state halted all funding and California Highway Patrol agents raided the building. (Google Maps)

**By Clara Harter**

Los Angeles Times, Staff Writer

The state has filed a lawsuit against the Foodbank of Southern California alleging that **its leaders misappropriated more than \$11 million in state funds to enrich themselves and their families over the course of a decade.**

The nearly 50-year-old Long Beach nonprofit shuttered most operations in September after the state halted all funding and California Highway Patrol agents [raided the building](#) as part of an investigation into the nonprofit's use of government money.

## **Long Beach food bank closes amid investigation into misuse of public funds**

**Oct. 5, 2024**

For years, the food bank operated as a grocery-and-meal distribution hub serving hundreds of food pantries in Long Beach and South Los Angeles thanks to millions of dollars in funding from the Department of Social Services.

But the state's lawsuit, filed March 25, **alleges that board members used the money on trips to Las Vegas, a home renovation, cellphones, smartwatches, Christmas decor, a truck, for-profit business ventures and more.** The lawsuit was first reported by the Daily Journal.

“For at least the last decade, the Foodbank’s officers, directors, and vendors worked together to divert millions of dollars of state and federal funds away from these most vulnerable communities, into their own pockets,” the complaint states.

**The lawsuit names 10 current or former board members and two of their family members.**

Brian Weaver, the food bank’s chief executive, told The Times in an interview on Monday that he was appalled to be named in the suit, saying that he had been working to root out fraud in the organization since taking over as chief executive last spring.

He said he had hired a forensic accounting firm to investigate internal corruption after discovering millions of dollars’ worth of questionable payouts.

“Almost all the evidence that they [the state’s attorneys] have is based on the forensic investigation that we initiated,” he said, referring to the lawsuit.

**The lawsuit alleges that former board Treasurer Giuseppe Briguglio and his relative Abele Briguglio funneled more than \$6.28 million in state funding into contracts with personal businesses that provided “nonexistent or unusable goods or services” to the food bank.**

Another former board member, Dion Rambo, is accused by the state of entering into an agreement for his company, **Southwest Group, to provide advertising services for the nonprofit. The company received \$279,749 from the food bank but did not provide the contracted services**, the lawsuit alleges.

“Upon information and belief, Defendant Rambo kept those funds for personal use,” according to the lawsuit.

Rambo said the state’s claims are inaccurate and the nonprofit received the branded items he was contracted to provide, with the exception of a brochure that the former chief executive, Jeanne Cooper, had requested changes on.

Cooper and her husband, Lamarr Ramsey, are accused of owing the Department of Social Services more than \$250,000. The state alleges she purchased cellphones, smartwatches, home renovations, furniture, home lawn services, gas cards, gift cards and an artificial Christmas tree with food bank funds.

Cooper, Ramsey and the Briguglios did not immediately respond to The Times’ request for comment.

Cooper denied using the nonprofit’s funds for personal use in an October [statement to NBC4](#). At the time, she told the station she had alerted state officials to the ongoing misuse of funds.

Cooper stepped down as CEO in March 2024 and was replaced by Weaver.

The state’s lawsuit alleges that **Weaver used government funds to purchase a personal Tesla and write a \$20,000 cashier’s check.**

**Cal State Long Beach athletics staffers stole thousands from school, D.A. says**

**March 4, 2025**

Weaver said the Tesla was a work vehicle that had been registered in his name as it was cheaper to have it on his personal insurance after a former employee crashed the previous work car. He said the check was used to pay for service completed on a company truck after the state froze all funding to the nonprofit.

Among the other people named in the complaint is community activist [“Sweet” Alice Harris](#), who founded Parents of Watts, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting disadvantaged youth and families in Watts.

The lawsuit alleges that Harris used her position on the food bank’s board to funnel more than \$173,000 in funding to Parents of Watts.

She’s also accused of using her role to hire her granddaughter as a salaried employee and appoint her son-in-law to the board.

Harris told The Times on Thursday night that the claims against her in the lawsuit are “not true at all.”

She said that Cooper provided Ralphs gift cards for Harris to distribute through Parents of Watts but that she personally had no role in managing the food bank’s funding.

“We didn’t handle money, and we didn’t see paperwork that showed where the money went,” she said. “I believe in doing right. I’ve been that way my whole life.”

Weaver laments that the food bank’s operations have been halted in the wake of the probe. The nonprofit delivered 40 million to 60 million pounds of food annually to 275 pantries that serve more than 850,000 food-insecure individuals, according to its website.

“A lot of people are going hungry,” he said. “A lot of people are suffering.”